



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE MEANING OF HISTORY: DEUT. 8:2-5

PROFESSOR W. G. JORDAN, D.D.
Queen's University, Kingston, Ont.

In a brief exegetical article on a particular passage one cannot deal with questions belonging to what is called "Old Testament Introduction;" and, as far as possible, the pulpit is best kept free from such discussions; they lie behind the work of the preacher and only call for indirect reference. Fortunately for us, the passage that we have chosen is a part of a noble sermon and does not urgently demand a discussion of the many critical problems connected with this wonderful book. We may begin then by setting our passage in the framework of the chapter to which it belongs; here again, because of our practical purpose and limited space, we avoid the critical questions as to the composite character of the chapter and the section of the book of which it forms a part. But, if we have considered that question, as a result of our examination of its contents, we see more clearly than before that there are three distinct shades of thought or lines of exhortation.

1. The exhortation to obedience with the promise of prosperity as the result of such obedience (vs. 1). Here we meet a thought very common in the Old Testament that those who keep the laws of God and the rules of the church will enjoy great and continual blessing. This principle may be stated in a general way and hardened into a dogma; then it begets skepticism and calls for free discussion (Ps. 73; the Book of Job). This particular truth may also become too external and be referred largely to the ecclesiastical region, then it may produce a shallow formalism. But after all, there is a living wholesome truth in the idea that possession of a good land and prosperity of many kinds flows from obedience to the laws of our Creator and Redeemer.

2. Then there is this exhortation to be loyal to Jehovah by shunning idolatry (vss. 19, 20). Let us remember that this exhortation is to be taken literally. The modern preacher may spiritualize it by

calling upon us to beware of making an idol of money, of pleasure, of fame or some other seductive thing, but in its original sense it does not apply to us. That battle in its special form was fought and won, though it may come back in more subtle forms. When this book was written the belief in one God still needed to be fought for as against the temptations of various forms of idolatry, sensuous and fascinating, that were still common among Israel's neighbors.

3. The great exhortation against forgetting God in the hour of prosperity through shallow sinful arrogance (vss. 2-5). This exhortation as we shall see bears the marks of the time in which it arose, but it is broad and spiritual in its nature; it bases itself upon facts and truths that are always present and it makes its great appeal in the name of principles that are of supreme importance and everlasting application. Beware of forgetting God in the hour of fulness, success, and pride; this is an exhortation quite pertinent to the life of our own time. There are so many great things that we are in danger of forgetting; the words, "lest ye forget," should often ring in our ears.

God of our fathers, known of old—
Lord of our far flung battle-line—
Beneath whose awful hand we hold
Dominion over palm and pine—
Lord God of hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget, lest we forget.

These words of the modern poet may be applied to the life of any great growing nation; they may have something of the accent of the Old Testament about them; and they correctly reproduce the spirit of this chapter, which with its varied appeals may be summed up in the suggestive words, "lest ye forget." But the chapter is not the mere repetition of one phrase, however great; it is full of great thoughts.

1. *The sacredness of memory.*—There are times when we need to be warned against dwelling too much in the past; when we are called in trumpet tones to let the dead past bury its dead and press forward to a living available future. That is well, but the exhortation of this text also has its place; memory is a sacred power; its use may be full of blessing. Without memory we cannot think or live in any deep sense. This wonderful faculty lies behind all our mental life and

plays a great part in our education. And in the spiritual life, strictly so called, memory has an important part to play.

The derivation of the Hebrew word for "remember" is suggestive; the root goes back to the idea of "piercing" or "pricking." This carries our thoughts to a time when our elaborate apparatus of books and libraries did not exist and the aids to memory were simple marks or signs to recall the things that must not be forgotten. By pricking or marking a thing was made memorable. But here the writer means by the memorable thing, not so much the thing that you have observed or recorded as the thing that has marked you—the sharp experience that has left its mark upon your soul. Like the mark upon the hand which never washes away because it has been pricked in and mingled with the life blood; or like the coin which in the hour of sharp pressure receives a stamp and individuality; so in the life of each one there are memorable experiences after which life is never precisely the same.

Sometimes this great gift has seemed to be a burden; men with a dark past have thought that the greatest blessing would be the power to forget. This is a delusion; for good or evil our roots are in the past and could our prayer for the power to forget be granted it would be a barren blessing or even a curse. The memory of sorrow gives us the power of sympathy; the remembrances of our failures should quicken in us a forgiving spirit. We do well to give heed to the exhortation to remember *all* the way. We are apt to pick out the bright bits, to think of the places where we have shown ourselves clever and achieved success. Thus we may make the past minister to our small conceit. The wilderness that lies behind has still its power of ministry; the dark places of our life have their message; they tell of our weakness and of God's consolation and guidance. Happy are they who know the meaning of those sublime words, "Thou hast not taken away the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night from before thy people, to go by day and night." Let us not then in any spirit of careless forgetfulness cut ourselves off from the past before we have learned the great lessons that have been set before us in such living forms. Those forty years carry in themselves lessons for all the centuries.

2. *The meaning of history.*—"Thou" here refers not to the individual person, but to the nation as a whole. When we are accustomed

to Evangelical preaching we are apt to forget this primary application of the personal pronouns in the Old Testament appeals. There are many strong reasons for remembering it; we are thus reminded that many of the same spiritual principles are applicable to the nation as well as to the individual, and in that way, we are guarded against pressing the distinction between personal and social salvation too far. We learn also that the Old Testament has a living message for today, when national questions and social problems are of supreme importance. Every really great nation has something noble in its past that ought to be used in inspiring noble ideals for the present. History is the memory of the nation; it is also a book of God. The Hebrew prophets have given to us this great idea of the God of history, and we ought to use the past in such a way as to quicken a wholesome national faith.

When we come to study of Hebrew history what a scanty record of facts we have and yet what noble ideas? We read of "forty years" in the wilderness, and we would have difficulty in making a full record of forty weeks. Now we do not despise facts, but how easily the details slip away from us especially those that concern the earliest days. We hunger for more "facts," but let us rejoice that we have such great ideas interpreting the facts making them alive with human feeling and instinct with faith in God. What a great conviction this was for a nation to possess, that its early pioneer days, its wilderness journeyings had been a time of discipline and guidance from the hand of an ever-watchful God. Here is something that we must not let die. In our own times the struggle for social purity and political honor is sometimes a hard, wearying battle. Eternal vigilance is needed. The rigid enforcement of righteous law will do something. But we may expect more from the inspiration that comes from a true patriotism that is rooted in living piety. The men who know that liberty has been won by the toil and tears of saints and martyrs will not think lightly of political privilege and opportunity. The man who is faithful to the God of history will not be a traitor to his country. The man to whom the history of his nation's life, with its struggles and successes, its defeats and victories, is a record of God's guidance, of his stern discipline and tender consolation, will draw from the past, so rich in blessing, strength and hope for the life of today.

3. *Life's supreme lesson.*—The outcome of it all is that man does not live by bread alone; but we must inquire what the Deuteronomic preacher means by this statement. An interesting verbal point may be noted in passing; in vs. 3 the word translated "man" is the common comprehensive word which includes men and women, masters and slaves, while in vs. 5 we have the distinctive word for man, man the father, the ruler of the family, the head of the tribe. The spiritual need and capacity is not a matter of age, sex, or station; it is common to all of us; to attain a real life we need something more than the common bread. We find this deep craving in ourselves, it is of the essence of our life; it makes religion not only possible but absolutely necessary. This is moreover the great lesson of life which we learn from the past experience of the individual and the nation. Usually we take this to mean that "bread" is not sufficient for a man, and that mere commercial success cannot satisfy a living nation. Surely this is a great truth, even if we do not interpret the word "bread" in a narrow fashion. Let it include all kinds of things that minister to our life on its many sides. Even then it is true that we cannot live on "things." In this region we might monopolize the whole world of things and yet lose our real life.

But is this the specific meaning of this prophetic writer? Does he not set the special and mysterious in opposition to the common in a way that separates him from what we call "the modern" mode of thought. Mark how he insists on the mystery of the manna. "Neither your skill nor the wisdom of your fathers could compass and comprehend it." The common bread, the regular routine, this is not sufficient. We must have mysterious deliverance and special providence. This writer is not mechanical like the Rabbinic expositors of later days who said that the raiment grew on the backs of the people, and the shoes were not destroyed by hard wear. That looks as if it would be a fine solution of life's petty problems. Such exposition is however taking noble poetry and turning it into very wooden prose; from such a process both literature and life suffer. What we have here is the statement that the wilderness period was a time of special guidance and blessing, and that by reflecting upon it we learn that men need "special providences." This is a great truth; no man of real religious faith would think of denying it. But it is not the whole

truth. When we hear these words falling from the lips of our Lord some six centuries later they have a different accent. History repeats itself, but not in any parrot-like manner. When the great word comes back it is with new intonation and a different shade of meaning. Now it is the tempter who lays stress upon the "special providence" and the mysterious bread. Jesus will walk down the ordinary staircase and eat the common bread. God is manifested in the common as well as in the special. Apparent contradiction, but deep harmony; two sides of the one great truth. We must not be driven to find God merely in the gaps and mysteries; we know he is there because we have found him in the ordered world. The noble exhortation not to forget God in our moments of proud success is just as powerful when we are meditating upon "the reign of law" as when we stand face to face with the mystery that scorns our keenest science. When we grasp the great truth of the sacredness of the common bread, set forth in the life of Jesus Christ, we will cherish the more intelligently the lesson of the manna "which thou knowest not, neither did thy fathers know," and learn the full meaning of the great saying that "man doth not live by bread alone."